



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

PUBLICATIONS  
OF THE  
Modern Language Association of America  
1912

---

VOL. XXVII, 2

NEW SERIES, VOL. XX, 2

---

VII.—*RICHARD THE THIRD, ACT I, SCENE 4*

The chief source of Shakespeare's tragedy of *Richard the Third* has long been acknowledged to be either Hall's or Holinshed's prose Chronicle. In addition, some echoes have been discovered in it of the Latin tragedy, *Richardus Tertius*, of the anonymous English *True Tragedie of Richard the Third*, and of Marlowe's play, *Edward the Second*.<sup>1</sup> But for one of the longest and most impressive scenes in Shakespeare's drama, that in which Clarence in prison meets his death at the hands of two ruffians hired for the deed by his brother, the Duke of Gloucester, no source is generally known. For the basis of the entire scene, Hall's Chronicle, which is so close akin to most situations in the play, contains of Clarence's death merely the statement that "attainted was he by parliament and

<sup>1</sup>The whole subject of sources has been minutely examined by Professor G. B. Churchill in his volume, *Richard III up to Shakespeare, Palaestra*, No. 10, Berlin, 1900. "Source of the Plot" likewise occupies almost a hundred fine-print pages of the Appendix in Furness's *Variorum Richard the Third*, Philadelphia, 1908.

judged to death, and there vpon hastily drowned in a butte of malmesey within the towre of London.”<sup>1</sup> Mr. P. A. Daniel expresses the common opinion of Shakespearean scholars to-day in saying, “Shakespeare seems to have been indebted to his own imagination only, for the scene of Clarence in prison, his beautiful narrative of his dream, and the less happy dialogue of the murderers.”<sup>2</sup>

Certain points of general similarity between this scene and that of the murder of King Edward in Marlowe’s *Edward II* have, it is true, not escaped observation; but little has been said of the much stronger resemblances between this and one of the scenes in the anonymous *King Leir*. Inasmuch as that little is in danger of being forgotten, and its bearing on many problems connected with the tragedy has been entirely overlooked, it may be proper to present the case in more detail than has been previously attempted.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Furness, p. 465. Holinshed at this point uses practically the same words. It should be added that Churchill shows that Shakespeare was not the first to charge Gloucester with responsibility for this murder, but that popular tradition had already fixed the crime on him.

<sup>2</sup>Introduction to Griggs’s *Facsimile Edition*, p. xv, quoted by Furness, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup>I am not aware that the matter has been discussed in print save by two scholars. Thirty-five years ago, H. F. von Friesen, writing of the older *Leir* in his *Shakespeare-Studien*, III, p. 86, declared: “In der Scene, wo beide der von Ragan gedungene Mörder findet, wird man zwar oberflächlich an die Scene zwischen Clarence und den Mördern in *Richard III* erinnert, aber es kommt nicht im Entferntesten zu einer ähnlichen Erschütterung.” Much more recently Dr. Wilfrid Perrett in *The Story of King Lear from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Shakespeare* (*Palaestra*, No. 35, Berlin, 1904, pp. 113-114), pointed out some of the verbal parallels noted below, and stated that he was “inclined to think” Shakespeare met with the *Leir* previously to writing *Richard the Third*. But neither von Friesen nor Perrett is mentioned by Furness. Even Dr. Sidney Lee

I

In summarizing the passage from *Richard the Third*, it will be convenient to begin about twenty lines before the scene under discussion, *i. e.*, in Act I, Scene 3, where Gloucester is conferring with the two murderers about the intended crime. He learns that they are just going to "dispatch this thing," gives them the warrant for admittance to the prison, and adds:

"But, sirs, be sudden in the execution,  
Withal obdurate, do not hear him plead;  
For Clarence is well-spoken, and perhaps  
May move your hearts to pity, if you mark him.  
1 Murd. Tut, tut, my lord, we will not stand to prate.  
Talkers are no good doers; be assur'd  
We go to use our hands and not our tongues."

Gloucester expresses his admiration and hastens them about their business. There the scene closes.

Scene 4 begins with a conversation between Clarence and his Keeper,<sup>1</sup> as follows:

"Keep. Why looks your Grace so heavily to-day?  
Clar. O, I have pass'd a miserable night,  
So full of fearful dreams, of ugly sights,  
That as I am a Christian faithful man,

in his modern text of *Leir*, which shows so much debt to Perrett, ignores the subject of *Richard III*. My own evidence was collected before I saw the observations of either of my forerunners.

Dr. Alice I. P. Wood in her *Stage History of King Richard the Third* (Columbia University Studies in English, New York, 1909), pp. 34-5, classes the scene as an imitation of *Edward the Second*, and speaks of "the strange introduction of the grotesquely humorous conversation of the murderers before the deed, a touch entirely lacking in any of the similar scenes in other plays." It is not lacking in the *King Leir*.

<sup>1</sup>So Ff. Qq. have "Brokenbury." I am following Neilson's text of *Richard III*, which is based on the Folio.

I would not spend another such a night,  
 Though 'twere to buy a world of happy days,  
*So full of dismal terror* was the time.

*Keep.* *What was your dream, my lord? I pray you, tell me.*

*Clar.* Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower,  
 And was embark'd to cross to Burgundy."

He then relates his dream that as he walked with Gloucester upon the hatches, talking of the past, Gloucester stumbled and in falling struck him overboard. In lines remarkable for poetic beauty he describes the fear and pain of his death, his passage of "the melancholy flood," and the meeting with ghosts of those he had wronged in life. He concludes the narrative:

"With that, methought, a legion of foul fiends  
 Environ'd me, and howled in mine ears  
 Such hideous cries, that with the very noise  
*I trembling wak'd*, and for a season after  
 Could not believe but that I was in hell,  
 Such terrible impression made my dream.

*Keep.* No marvel, lord, though it affrighted you;  
 I am afraid, methinks, to hear you tell it.

*Clar.* Ah! Keeper, Keeper, I have done those things  
 That now give evidence against my soul  
 For Edward's sake; and see how he requites me!  
*O God! if my deep prayers cannot appease thee,*  
*But thou wilt be avenged on my misdeeds,*  
*Yet execute thy wrath in me alone!*  
*O, spare my guiltless wife and my poor children!*  
*Keeper, I prithee, sit by me a while.*  
*My soul is heavy, and I fain would sleep.*

*Keep.* I will, my lord. God give your Grace good rest!

[*Clarence sleeps.*"]

While he is sleeping, the two murderers enter, present their warrant, and are left alone with Clarence. Between these ruffians the following colloquy ensues:

"2 *Murd.* *What, shall we stab him as he sleeps?*

1 *Murd.* No; he'll say 'twas done cowardly when he wakes.

2 Murd. *Why, he shall never wake until the great judgement-day.*

1 Murd. *Why, then he'll say we stabb'd him sleeping.*

2 Murd. *The urging of that word 'judgement' hath bred a kind of remorse in me.*

1 Murd. *What, art thou afraid?*

2 Murd. *Not to kill him, having a warrant; but to be damn'd for killing him, from the which no warrant can defend me.*

1 Murd. *I thought thou hadst been resolute.*

2 Murd. *So I am, to let him live."*

However, when the First Murderer mentions the reward that they are to have for slaying their victim, his companion's remorse is temporarily appeased. Yet again a minute later his conscience reappears "*even now at my elbow*, persuading me not to kill the Duke." Finally they are about to strike, when Clarence stirs, and they decide to "reason with him" before slaying him.

Clarence, addressing the now absent Keeper, calls for a cup of wine. The First Murderer retorts, "You shall have wine enough, my lord, anon." A few more words pass, and Clarence asks the men plainly if they have come to murder him. Both answer affirmatively. Clarence inquires how he has offended them, to which they reply that he has offended not them, but the King, and they counsel him to prepare to die. The Duke demands why they have been "drawn forth" to slay the innocent, what evidence lies against him, and what jury has found him guilty:

"Before I be convict by course of law,  
To threaten me with death is most unlawful."

He then charges them to depart without laying hands on him, since "the deed you undertake is damnable." They reply that they are acting under command from the King. Clarence reminds them that murder is forbidden by the King of kings:

"Take heed; for He holds vengeance in His hand  
To hurl upon their heads that break His law."

The Second Murderer counters on Clarence, declaring that God's vengeance is hurled on him "for false forswearing and for murder too," in that after receiving the sacrament to fight for Lancaster, he broke that vow and slew his sovereign's son, referring to Prince Edward, son to Henry VI.

"1 *Murd.* How canst thou urge God's dreadful law to us,  
When thou hast broke it in such dear degree?"

Clarence asserts that this deed was done for the sake of King Edward, who would evidently not have him murdered on that account, and he begs them to leave the punishment to God. The First Murderer asks what incited the Duke's murder of Plantagenet. Clarence replies, it was his brother's love, the Devil, and his rage. The First Murderer declares they are moved by his brother's love, their duty, and his faults.

"*Clar.* If you do love my brother, hate not me!  
*I am his brother, and I love him well.*  
If you are hir'd for meed, go back again,  
*And I will send you to my brother Gloucester,*  
*Who shall reward you better for my life*  
*Than Edward will for tidings of my death."*

The murderers assert that Gloucester hates him, but Clarence will not credit such a report. At last the First Murderer tells him plainly that Gloucester is the one who has sent them thither.

"*Clar.* It cannot be; for he bewept my fortune  
And hugg'd me in his arms, and swore with sobs  
That he would labour my delivery.  
1 *Murd.* Why, so he doth, when he delivers you  
From this earth's thralldom to the joys of heaven."

The Duke tries another tack:

"O sirs, consider, they that set you on  
To do this deed will hate you for the deed.

2 Murd. What shall we do?

Clar. Relent, and save your souls."

The First Murderer believes to relent is cowardly and womanish; not to relent, ejaculates Clarence, is devilish. He questions them whether, if they were in his position, they would not entreat for life, and addressing the Second Murderer, adds:

"My friend, I spy some pity in thy looks.  
O, if thine eye be not a flatterer,  
Come thou on my side, and entreat for me."

This speech has some effect on the ruffian, who immediately warns him to look behind, but at that moment the First Murderer stabs Clarence twice, and threatens, if that will not do, to drown him "in the malmsey-butt within." His companion repents his part in the "bloody deed," and relinquishes the entire fee to the more hardened villain, who goes to "hide the body in some hole."

## II

For a clear understanding of the scene mentioned from the pre-Shakespearian *King Leir*, the situation in the latter case needs to be briefly explained. Leir, after enduring repeated insults and mistreatment from his eldest daughter Gonorill, with whom he has been residing, has escaped secretly from her court to visit Ragan. His sole companion is Perillus, a faithful old noble, corresponding to Kent in Shakespeare's *Lear*. Gonorill, suspecting their purpose, has bribed a messenger to carry





Of course, the corresponding moment in *Richard the Third* is after the relation of Clarence's dream, when the Keeper sits by him for company. While they, like Clarence, sleep, "Enter the Messenger, or murderer, with two daggers in his hands." He sees his victims, and starts, but observing that they have prayed themselves asleep, he first takes their books away, and then soliloquizes:

*"Now could I stab them bravely, while they sleep,"—*

words which will be noted as almost exactly those that Shakespeare puts into the mouth of the Second Murderer at the corresponding juncture in his play. But the Messenger, recollecting Ragan's injunction to show the letter, stands aside when the old men wake. Leir expresses surprise at his daughter's continued absence, and Perillus fears that they have mistaken the place. The King is nervous, declaring:

*"I had a short nap, but so full of dread,  
As much amazeth me to think thereof."*

Perillus holds the opinion that dreams are only fantasies, but inquires:

*Leir.*       *"I pray my lord, what was the effect of it? . . . .  
Methought my daughters, Gonorill and Ragan,  
Stood both before me."*

Each bore a falchion, and they stabbed him a hundred times, leaving him for dead. But then his youngest daughter, Cordella, healed his wounds with balsam. The details of this vision do not interest us particularly except that, as in Clarence's case, the result of the attack on the dreamer is foreshadowed and the instigators of the murder are revealed. Both sleepers are badly frightened. Leir concludes his story:

*"And with the fear of this I did awake,  
And yet for fear my feeble joints do quake."*

Immediately the murderer shows himself and commands the old men to stand and deliver, twitting them for falling asleep when they should have watched and prayed.

*"Leir. My friend, thou seem'st to be a proper man.  
Mess. 'Sblood, how the old slave claws me by the elbow!"*

Leir and Perillus then hand over their purses, which the murderer puts in his pocket.

*"Leir. Why then farewell: and if thou have occasion  
In any thing to use me to the Queen,  
'Tis like enough that I can pleasure thee.  
[They proffer to go.]"*

The Messenger, doubting the sincerity of this last remark, says as much.

*"Per. Mistrust not him, but try him when thou wilt:  
He is her father, therefore may do much."*

Thus urged, the Messenger announces that the queen has tied him by oath to see them both dispatched, and he proposes that they aid his conscience, save him labor, and make their word good by killing themselves.

*"Leir. Affright us not with terror, good my friend,  
Nor strike such fear into our aged hearts.  
Play not the cat, which dallieth with the mouse,  
And on a sudden maketh her a prey:  
But if thou art mark'd for the man of death  
To me and to my Damon, tell me plain."*

The Messenger again declares that he was sent there for the express purpose of slaying Leir, who is so wicked that his own children seek to shorten his life. The old king inquires whether he came from France with that purpose.

The Messenger affects to be insulted at being taken for a Frenchman, and demands the reason. Because his daughter, whom he has offended and ill treated, is queen of France, Leir answers, and offers in case Cordella does seek revenge, to resign his life willingly, since he is unworthy to live. The murderer replies that he never heard Cordella's name before, nor has he ever been in France. Then he counters beautifully on Leir:

"But thy own tongue declares that thou hast been  
A vile old wretch, and full of heinous sin."

This charge the king denies, asserting that with the one exception named, he is "in true peace with all the world." "*You are the fitter for the King of heaven,*" is the quick retort. The Messenger then explains that Gonorill and Ragan appointed him "to massacre thee here," and continues:

"Why wouldst thou then persuade me that thou art  
In charity with all the world but now,  
When thy own issue hold thee in such hate  
That they have hired me to abridge thy fate?  
Oh, fie upon such vile dissembling breath,  
That would deceive even at the point of death.  
*Per.* Am I awake, or is it but a dream?  
*Mess.* Fear nothing, man, thou art but in a dream,  
*And thou shalt never wake until doomsday;*  
By then, I hope, thou wilt have slept enough."

Before dying, Leir demands some proof that his two elder daughters have incited his murder. The Messenger swears first by heaven and then by earth, but Leir rejects both proffered oaths on the ground of heaven and earth's common hatred of murderers.

"*Mess.* Why then, by hell, and all the devils I swear.  
*Leir.* Swear not *by hell*; for that stands gaping wide,  
To swallow thee, and if thou do this deed.

[Thunder and Lightning.]

*Mess.* I would that word were in his belly again,  
 It hath frighted me even to the very heart;  
*This old man is some strong magician:*  
 His words have turn'd my mind from this exploit.  
 Then neither heaven, earth, nor hell be witness;  
 But let this paper witness for them all.  
[Shows Gonorill's letter.]  
*Shall I relent, or shall I prosecute?*  
 Shall I resolve, or were I best recant?  
 I will not crack my credit with two queens,  
 To whom I have already pass'd my word.  
 Oh, but my conscience for this act doth tell,  
 I get heaven's hate, earth's scorn, and pains of hell.  
[They bless themselves.]

Perillus exclaims against Leir's "viperous generation," but his lord, submitting to God's will, declares himself ready for the stroke and forgives his executioner.

*"Mess.* But I am not prepared for to strike."

Leir expresses his dying wish that Perillus shall carry Cordella her father's blessing with his request for forgiveness.

*"Mess.* Why, he must *go along with you to heaven:*  
 It were not good you should go all alone."

King Leir says that such event will come in due course.

*"Mess.* Nay, presently, to bear you company.  
 I have a passport for him in my pocket,  
 Already seal'd, and he *must needs ride post.*  
[Shews a bag of money.]

There is further parley in much the same tone. Leir and Perillus are each begging him to spare the other's life, while the murderer in the highest spirits wittily turns against them their every speech. One of Leir's appeals bears a slight resemblance to Clarence's pathetic prayer in behalf of his guiltless wife and children:

*“Leir.* Friend, thy commission is to deal with me,  
*And I am he that hath deserved all: . . . . .*  
 Yet for my sake, and as thou art a man,  
*Spare this my friend,* that hither with me came:  
 I brought him forth, whereas he had not been,  
 But for good will, to bear me company.”

The Messenger, after Leir has kneeled down to beg the life of Perillus and has alluded to the heavenly reward to be obtained by the merciful, is forced to acknowledge that “the strength of their persuasions stirs me a little.”

Perillus now makes the final appeal, summing up their case. If “fear of the almighty power” can move him, they have said enough. If he seeks more gold, they have no more to give. But considering the ever-haunting horrors that must follow such a crime, to commit it will not profit the murderer:

*“Think this again, that they which would incense  
 Thee for to be the butcher of their father,  
 When it is done, for fear it should be known,  
 Would make a means to rid thee from the world:  
 Oh then art thou for ever tied in chains  
 Of everlasting torments to endure,  
 Even in the hottest hole of grisly hell,  
 Such pains, as never mortal tongue can tell.  
 [It thunders. He quakes, and lets fall the dagger  
 next to Perillus.*

*Leir.* O, heavens be thanked, he will spare my friend.  
 Now, when thou wilt, come make an end of me.  
*[He lets fall the other dagger.*  
*Per.* Oh, happy sight! He means to save my lord.  
 The king of heaven continue this good mind.  
*Leir.* Why stay'st thou to do execution?  
*Mess.* I am as wilful as you for your life:  
 I will not do it, now you do entreat me.  
*Per.* Ah, now I see thou hast some spark of grace.  
*Mess.* Beshrew you for it, you have put it in me:  
 The parlousest old men, that e'er I heard.  
 Well, to be flat, I'll not meddle with you:

Here I found you, and here I'll leave you:  
If any ask you why the case so stands?  
Say that *your tongues were better than your hands.*  
[Exit Messenger.]

Thus the old men escape assassination.

### III

The close resemblance in situation between these two scenes just summarized may best be brought out, I believe, by the use of a continuous narrative which applies equally to both:—

A man of royal birth is to be stabbed to death by a murderer (or murderers) hired for the purpose by one whose fiendish hatred has been carefully concealed from the intended victim. The instigator of the crime warns the agent (or agents) beforehand not to be moved by the glib tongue of the condemned man (or men). The murderer agrees but later forgets this injunction. The murder scene opens with the victim complaining of heaviness of spirits, and before long he falls asleep. During his nap (or in one just before it) he has a vision symbolizing what is to take place, and revealing the principal in the murder that is planned for him. He relates this dream in detail to a sympathetic companion, stating that he trembled with fear at his awakening.

While the condemned man sleeps, the murderer enters, comments on his opportunity to stab the sleeper, but decides to speak with him before slaying him. The victim rouses himself, and the assassin announces his purpose in plain language. Then begins a long discussion, the victim rebuking the ruffian for threats of violence, and receiving the information that the command to kill comes

from royalty. Further pleas draw counter-charges from the murderer, who asserts that the victim is getting a just reward for his past wickedness. The victim moreover claims to possess influence with a certain royal personage close akin to him, but is amazed on making such statement to learn not only that this personage hates him, but that he is actually the principal in this crime. The victim has believed that an innocent brother (or sister) of the guilty person was responsible for it. He next attempts to move the villain's compassion by appeal to his fear of divine wrath, and in the effort partially succeeds. He also mentions the danger that the principal may later murder his agent in order to conceal the crime. The result of these appeals is to make the murderer (or one of the murderers) relent.

Now it must be kept in mind that the whole object of this summary is not to present a complete outline of either scene under discussion. Differences between these scenes in the number of murderers, number of victims, background, general effect, *dénouement*, and specific details have been purposely left out of account, in order to make the resemblance as clear as possible. And when these differences are once brushed aside, the residuum, in my opinion, presents a remarkable analogy between the respective scenes—an analogy which can scarcely be explained as fortuitous, or as due to literary and dramatic conventions.

Yet if one of these plays is indebted to the other for so many details of situation, we should expect to find further and more convincing evidence in verbal parallels between them. That such is the case will be seen below:



## RICHARD THE THIRD.

## KING LEIR.

"But, sirs, *be sudden in the execution,*

Withal obdurate, do not hear him plead;

*For Clarence is well spoken.*"  
(I, 3, 346-8.)

"We go to use our hands and not our tongues." (I, 3, 352.)

"O! I have pass'd a miserable night,

So full of fearful dreams, of ugly sights." (I, 4, 2-3.)

"What was your dream, my lord? I pray you, tell me."  
(I, 4, 8.)

"I trembling wak'd and for a season after

Could not believe but that I was in hell." (I, 4, 61-2.)

"Clar. Keeper, I prithee, sit by me a while.

My soul is heavy, and I fain would sleep.

Keep. I will, my lord. God give your Grace good rest!  
[Clarence sleeps.]"

(I, 4, 73-5.)

"2 Murd. What, shall we stab him as he sleeps?"

1 Murd. No; he'll say 'twas done cowardly, when he wakes.

2 Murd. Why, he shall never wake until the great judgment-day." (I, 4, 101-6.)

"1 Murd. I thought thou hadst been resolute.

"And then proceed to execution:

But see thou faint not; for they will speak fair." (IV, 5, 52-3.)

"Say that your tongues were better than your hands."  
(IV, 7, 306.)

"I had a short nap, but so full of dread,

As much amazeth me to think thereof." (IV, 7, 42-3.)

"I pray, my lord, what was the effect of it [the dream]?"  
(IV, 7, 48.)

"And with the fear of this I did awake,

And yet for fear my feeble joints do quake." (IV, 7, 63-4.)

Per. I'll sit and pray with you for company;

Yet was I ne'er so heavy in my life. [They fall both asleep.]" (IV, 7, 18-9.)

"Now could I stab them bravely while they sleep."

(IV, 7, 31.)

"Thou shalt never wake until doomsday."<sup>1</sup> (IV, 7, 176.)

<sup>1</sup> Cf. a later allusion to this scene (V, 10, 93):

"But never wake more till the latter day."

RICHARD THE THIRD.

KING LEIR.

2 *Murd.* So I am, to let him "I am as wilful as you for your  
live." (I, 4, 116-7). life." (IV, 7, 298.)

"2 *Murd.* What shall we do?

*Clar.* Relent, and save your "Mess. Shall I relent, or shall  
souls." (I, 4, 263.) I prosecute?" (IV, 7, 199.)

But granting that the scene in *Leir* is the source of Shakespeare's scene, we might expect to find echoes of its lines in other parts of *Richard the Third*, for it is likely that Shakespeare would consciously or unconsciously follow its phrasing elsewhere than in this particular scene. Such parallels are to be found in earlier scenes of *Richard the Third*.

RICHARD THE THIRD.

KING LEIR.

"Till George be pack'd with  
post-horse up to heaven."  
(I, 1, 146.)

"Why, he must go along with  
you to heaven; . . . .

I have a passport for him in my  
pocket,  
Already seal'd, and he must needs  
ride post."

(IV, 7, 231, 237-8.)

"*Leir.* Swear not by heaven, for  
fear of punishment:  
The heavens are guiltless of such  
heinous acts.

*Mess.* I swear by earth, the  
mother of us all.

"Either heaven with lightning  
strike the murderer dead,

*Leir.* Swear not by earth: for  
she abhors to bear

Or earth gape open wide and eat  
him quick,

Such bastards as are murderers  
of her sons.

*Mess.* Why then, by hell, and  
all the devils I swear.

As thou dost swallow up this  
good king's blood,

*Leir.* Swear not by hell; for  
that stands gaping wide,  
To swallow thee, and if thou do  
this deed. [*Thunder and  
Lightning.*]"

Which his hell-govern'd arm hath  
butchered." (I, 2, 64-7.)

(IV, 7, 185-92.)

## RICHARD THE THIRD.

## KING LEIR.

"Anne. O, he was gentle, mild,  
and virtuous!

Glou. *The fitter for the King of  
heaven, that hath him.*

Anne. He is *in heaven, where  
thou shalt never come.*"  
(I, 2, 104-6.)

"Leir. For I am in true peace  
with all the world.

Mess. You are *the fitter for the  
King of heaven.*"

(IV, 7, 162-3.)

"to send us both *to heaven,*  
Where, as I think, *you never  
mean to come.*"

(V, 10, 87-8, alluding to IV, 7.)

The closest of all these parallels is undoubtedly to be found in the last passage cited from *Richard the Third*, where the exact words, "*the fitter for the King of heaven,*" as well as the taunt conveyed in them, appear to have been borrowed without change. But in this connection it is worthy of note that the reading adopted here is that of the Quartos of *Richard*, while the Folio reading of the same line, "*The better for the King of heaven,*" is the one adopted by Neilson and generally preferred to-day. Delius,<sup>1</sup> upholding the Folio as the original and authoritative text, thought the word *fitter* due to an anonymous corrector, who in making the change from *better*, "*anticipt und schwächt zugleich durch diese Tautologie einen Gedanken, den Gloster erst in der nächsten Rede äussert: 'he was fitter for that place than earth.'*" But the fact that the Quarto phrasing either preserves a quotation, or is itself quoted, in a contemporary play, indicates that the line originally took that form.

The two brief citations from *King Leir*, Act V, Scene 10, occur in a passage where the incidents of Act IV,

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*, VII, p. 158. Perrett, *op. cit.*, p. 144, though he notes the parallel from *Leir*, is apparently ignorant of the Quarto reading; for it would strengthen his cause much more than does the Folio, which he quotes.

Scene 7, are specifically referred to by the intended victims of the Messenger, so that it is not unfair to adduce these lines in connection with the "murder scene."

One more situation in *Richard the Third* may be alluded to in passing. It occurs in Act I, Scene 2, where Gloucester woos Anne over her father-in-law's body, the very scene that furnished our last parallels. Gloucester in this scene kneels down, bares his breast, gives Anne his sword, and begs her to strike him with it. When in the quaint language of the stage direction, "*She falls the sword,*" we have reproduced what must have been to an Elizabethan audience the most dramatic moment in the *Leir* scene.

#### IV

Enough has been said, I think, to show some definite connection between the respective scenes in the two dramas, and the resemblances are of such nature that one would believe them to be due to conscious imitation on one side or the other. There remains the problem whether the imitator really was Shakespeare or the anonymous author of the *Leir*.

Though the case, as I see it now, does not admit of definite proof, the weight of the evidence points to Shakespeare as the borrower. For, in the first place, that he afterwards borrowed from *King Leir* in writing his own tragedy of the same name, has been proved beyond all question. The Kent-Perillus, Oswald-Messenger likenesses in character, the recognition scenes in the two plays, various turns of expression, and bits of stage business have convinced every careful reader not only that Shakespeare knew well the earlier play when, about 1605, he

wrote his *King Lear*, but that he was quick to act on every hint that it offered him for the development of a great drama. Then is it unreasonable to conclude that he became first acquainted with the *Leir* some ten years earlier than this time, in 1594, when, as we gather from Henslowe's Diary, it was a popular play on the London stage, and when, as the Stationer's Register says, it was entered for publication?

Furthermore, the *Leir*, though perhaps published later, seems from external evidence to have preceded the *Richard* in composition. Mr. W. W. Greg has recently pointed out<sup>1</sup> that Henslowe did not mark the *Leir* as new in April, 1594. Mr. Greg thinks it may well date "from before the plague of 1592-3." But the *Richard the Third* is usually dated 1594, certainly not earlier than 1593.

The very nature of the resembling lines and situations furnishes evidence, to my mind still more convincing, that *Leir* is the source and not the echo of Shakespeare. I cannot fully concur with Dr. Perrett in his wholesale condemnation of the scene in *Leir* as "longdrawn dullness," because I believe that the extremely nimble wit of the Messenger time and time again relieves the monotony of the old men's speeches. But much of the scene is pure melodrama of a cheap kind. Now in *Richard* the situation is wonderfully real, the pathos is tender, and the grim humor of the two murderers is so keyed down that its tone only adds to the horror of the total impression. One scene is crude, feeble, and childlike; while the other shows the grip of the poet as well as the master in dramatic technique. For example, *Leir* and *Perillus* in the anonymous play show no essential differ-

<sup>1</sup>In reviewing Lee's edition of *King Leir*, *Modern Language Review*, v, p. 516.

ence in character, except that one has daughters and the other has not. The murderer in the same play is fond of uttering long "asides," so that the audience may see that he is moved by two contrary impulses. When we find in Shakespeare one victim, but two murderers, one of whom vacillates while the other remains firm, we are convinced that this is the way it ought to be. It is difficult to believe that the author of *Leir*, who evidently has some knowledge of stagecraft, of character creation, and of dramatic structure, could have found so good a scene, and in reproducing botched it so badly.

But if Shakespeare is the borrower and not the lender, he is doing here only what we know that he does elsewhere. For instance, in transforming Arthur Brooke's poem into his drama of *Romeo and Juliet*, he accepts each lurking hint as to the character of Mercutio and of the Nurse, the interest of Friar Laurence in herbs, the picture of the Apothecary's shop visited by Romeo; and as imagination bodies forth the form of things unknown, his pen turns them to shapes. This accords with his practice in all other plays where modern criticism can trace his steps. The difference between the colorless vision seen by old *Leir*, and the dream described by Clarence—Hunter terms it "the highest triumph of the poet's art"—is typical, I should say, of the contrast between Shakespeare and his sources. In many of the verbal parallels noted, the crispness of Shakespeare's phrases, the deftness of his touch, as compared with the slow, regular cadence of the anonymous playwright, unmistakably suggests pioneer work on the part of the latter.

Finally, supposing that we pass from *Richard* to *Leir*, we discover not the same kind of borrowing as the author of *Leir* is known to have practised with other sources.

Here we are on certain ground. Dr. Perrett presents incontrovertible evidence that the *Leir* has three different sources—the poetical versions of the same story by Higgins, Warner, and Spenser. In each case the borrowing of words and phrases is open and, judged by modern standards, shameless. But one is surprised to find in this instance so many ideas borrowed, with comparatively so few words. If Shakespeare provided one more source for this early playwright, the latter has employed unusual precautions to hide his pilfering.

## V

If it is true that *Richard the Third* is not the source of the long scene in *King Leir*, where did this early playwright get the suggestion for his scene? Dr. Perrett shows that he was following a hint in Warner's *Albion's England*, in having the old king's daughters attempt to take their father's life. But this explanation does not begin to account for the details of the carefully worked out situation.

Several incidents in the scene are odd. The hired assassin comes in broad daylight, but finds his victims asleep. Then he deliberately rejects this fine opportunity to carry out his purpose and awaits their waking. When they are wide awake, the murderer frankly avows his intentions, gives the name of his employer, and argues for some time the justice of his conduct. Yet with all his boldness he is frightened away from his deed by Leir's mention of hell and the certainty of eternal punishment for such a crime as he is about to commit. His sudden change of heart seems to surprise him, and he can account for it only on the supposition that Leir "is some strong magician."

This last phrase may give us a clue. Was the author not thinking of some story connected with a "strong magician," where an attempted assassination was frustrated much in the manner just outlined? Such conditions are met with in one of the stories told of Friar Bacon in *The Famous Historie of Fryer Bacon*, the source of Greene's play, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. This account is headed "*How Vandermast, for the disgrace that he had received by Fryer Bacon sent a souldier to kill him; and how Fryer Bacon escaped killing, and turned the souldier from an Atheist to be a good Christian.*"<sup>1</sup> The story follows *verbatim*:—

"Fryer Bacon sitting one day in his study, looked over all the dangers that were to happen to him that moneth, there found he, that in the second week of the moneth between sunne rising and setting, there was a great danger to fall on him, which without great care of prevention take [*sic*] away his life. This danger which he did foresee, was caused by the Germane coniurer Vandermast, for he vowed a revenge for the disgrace that he had received. To execute the same, hee hyred a Walloon souldier, and gave him one hundred crownes to do the same, fifty beforehand, and fifty when hee had killed him.

"Fryer Bacon, to save himselfe from this danger that was like to happen to him, would alwayes when that he read, hold a ball of brasse in his hand, and under that ball would he set a bason of brasse, that if hee did chance to sleepe in his reading, the fall of the ball out of his hand into the bason, might wake him. Being one day in his study in this manner, and asleepe, the Walloon souldier was got in to him, and had drawne his sword

<sup>1</sup> Given in Thoms's *Early English Prose Romances*, Revised and Enlarged Edition, *Early Novelists*, ed. E. A. Baker, London, pp. 311-2.



to kill him: but as he *was ready for to strike*, downe fell the ball out of Fryer Bacon's hand, and waked him. Hee seeing the souldier stand there with a sword drawne, asked him what hee was? and wherefore hee came there in that manner? The souldier boldly answered him thus: I am a Walloon, and a souldier, and more then this, a villaine: I am come hither, because I was sent; I was sent, because I was hyred; I was hyred, because I durst do it: the thing I should doe, is not done: the thing to be done, is to kill thee: thus have you heard what I am and why I came. Fryer Bacon wondered at this man's resolution; then asked hee of hym, who set him on worke to bee a murderer? Hee boldly told him, Vandermast the German coniurer: Fryer Bacon then asked him what religion he was of? He answered, of that which many doe professe, the chief principles of which were these: to goe to an ale-house, and to a church with one devotion, to abstaine from evil for want of action, and to doe good against their wills. It is a good profession for a devil (said Fryer Bacon). Doest thou believe hell? I believe no such thing, answered the souldier. Then I will shew thee the contrary, said the Fryer: and presently raised the ghost of Iulian the Apostate, who came up with his body burning, and so full of wounds, that it almost did *affright the souldier out of his wits*. Then Bacon did command this spirit to speake, and to shew what hee was, and wherefore hee was thus tormented? Then spake hee to it in this manner: I sometimes was a Roman emperor: some count greatnesse a happinesse: I had happinesse beyond my empire, had I kept that, I had beene a happy man: would I had lost my empire when I lost that. I was a Christian, that was my happiness; but my selfe love and pride made me to fall from it; for which I now am punished with *never ceasing torments, which I must still endure*: the like

which I enioy is now prepared for unbeleeving wretches like myself, so vanished he away.

“All this while the souldier stood *quaking*, and sweat as he had felt the torments himselfe; and falling downe on his knees desired Fryer Bacon to instruct him in a better course of life, than he had yet gone in. Fryer Bacon told him, that he should not want his helpe in anything, which he performed, instructing him better: then gave he him money, and sent him to the warres of the holy land, where he was slain.”

What makes one hesitate to declare this the source of the *King Leir* scene is that only the suggestion of the situation is to be found in it, and the verbal parallels are not numerous. Yet with the italicized phrases above, compare *Leir*, “*Mess. But I am not prepared for to strike*”; “*It hath frighted me even to the very heart,*” speaking of *Leir*’s talk of hell; “*for ever tied in chains Of everlasting torments to endure*”; and the stage direction, “*He quakes, and lets fall the dagger.*” Evidence of indebtedness here may not be convincing, but it is at least worth making note of. To the scene of Clarence’s murder, however, the resemblance of this tale is not at all close.

Summing up now the conclusions to be drawn from what has been brought out in this article, I would say, first, that there is some close connection between the two scenes under discussion; second, that the probability is that Shakespeare is the borrower and not the source; third, that the *Historie of Fryer Bacon* may have served as the inspiration of the *Leir* scene, though this is not established. Whatever the conclusions, the bearing of this matter on the date and even the text of *Richard the Third* is, I think, obvious.

ROBERT ADGER LAW.